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Pentagon Secretly Prepares Plan for Missile Defense in Mid-1990's

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WASHINGTON, April 7 — The Pentagon is secretly preparing a detailed plan showing how defenses against nuclear missiles could be deployed in space in the mid-1990's, two Senators who oppose the plan disclosed today.

The Senators, William Proxmire of Wisconsin and J. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana, released a staff report concluding, on the basis of dozens of interviews with scientists working on missile defenses, that the Pentagon's Strategic Defense Initiative Organization has under way "a highly classified program which is developing a blueprint for deploying strategic defenses in the near term."

Behind the scenes, the report suggests, the Pentagon is moving as speedily as it can to select and prove the feasibility of technologies to shoot down missiles that could be fielded in a few years. The work is progressing even as the Pentagon publicly says that no final decision has been made about when to deploy such "Star Wars" defenses.

The Reagan Administration, which established the program four years ago as a research program, has since then been ambiguous on the question of when the research might lead to deployment.

In recent months Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger has provoked a sharp debate by suggesting that missile defenses might prove ready for deployment sooner than previously thought.

The 65-page Congressional staff study released today said that while the Administration had offered mixed signals in public about its intended timetable for deploying the first phase of a space-based defense against missiles, it had already taken steps to shift money into programs that could be deployed early.

"This reorientation is not awaiting a publicly announced Presidential decision to commit to near-term deployment," the report said.

The Senate report's authors were told repeatedly by Pentagon officials that the goals of the research program were not being shifted to early deployment. At the same time, they said, they learned that the program's directors were seeking proposals from contractors to do just that, and directing that important work emphasize near-term options.

The staff report contended that the Pentagon's classified work, described as an "architecture" for building space defenses, was classified so as to limit Congressional review of the plan, and that some scientists said that the secrecy also was being used to cover up

technical weaknesses in the plan.

The report, completed in March, was released after a security review by the Pentagon.

An expert in such research who is familiar with the Administration's approach to the program said that the report appeared to be referring to a systematic study now in progress that is meant to define more precisely what systems might be available for deployment in the 1990's. In recent months, the Administration has begun to discuss such a possibility publicly.

This expert, who asked not to be identified, said the missile defense office usually kept this type of study secret in preparation. He said the current study, to be completed this spring, was aimed at determining how quickly the program could be moved ahead under various arms control proposals that have been considered by the United States and the Soviet Union.

The report was published as lawmakers considered what level of spending to permit for missile defenses in 1988, and whether to constrain the Pentagon from conducting the kinds of tests in space that would be needed before deploying missile defenses based on small rocket interceptors stationed on orbiting satellites.

Last week, a subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee voted to sharply reduce the funds avail-

able for this kind of interceptor, which would destroy missiles by the kinetic force from colliding with them.

This year, according to the newly released staff report, the Pentagon sharply cut spending on lasers and other beam weapons, which are expected to take much longer to develop than kinetic weapons. Far smaller reductions were made in the kinetic weapons as the Pentagon chose where to apply overall reductions imposed by Congress.

In its requested budget for 1988, the Pentagon again protected spending for kinetic weapons at the expense of beam weapons.

Military program managers insisted in interviews with the Senators' staff that this was not being done to allow for an earlier deployment of Star Wars weapons, their report said. But after analyzing spending patterns, the staff members wrote, "the conclusion becomes inescapable that S.D.I. is in fact moving toward the near-term option."

The report's authors, Douglas C. Waller and James T. Bruce, estimated that the kind of early defense that might be deployable by 1994, a date that Mr. Weinberger has mentioned as a possible starting point for deployments, would be capable of knocking out only about one of every six Soviet missile warheads.